



## **Partners for Recovery Leadership Institute, 2004: Acquiring the Skills to Become a Stronger Leader**

**By Sara Moscato, Illinois Alcoholism and  
Drug Dependence Association**

In November 2004, I stepped into a room of 12 strangers, unaware that I would leave 5 days later with 12 new friends and a whole new world of opportunity in front of me. I had been excited to attend the Great Lakes Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) Leadership Institute, but when the week arrived, all I could think of was the work that was piling up on my desk back at the office. What could we possibly need to talk about for 5 days? As the Acting CEO of the Illinois Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Association (IADDA), it was incredibly difficult to break away from the office for a full week.

I had been in the Acting role for 11 months when the Institute began. The January before, our CEO was on a cruise in the Caribbean when her cell phone rang. It was the United States Army. She was to report to duty the following Monday for a year to 18 month deployment to Mosul, Iraq. I was promoted to the position of Acting CEO and would remain in the role until she returned safely home. By the middle of November, I was overstressed, overwhelmed, and under tremendous pressure (which I had heaped upon myself, I might add) to make the Association the strongest voice for the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders in the state. The Institute, I knew, would give me the additional tools and skills that I needed to make this happen.

Within the first few minutes of the Institute, it was clear to me that I was among a group of

people who were incredibly talented. We had a wonderful instructor, Nancy Rosenshine, who explained to us that we would explore leadership from the "inside out". At the end of the week, we would know our strengths and would have developed a plan to strengthen those skills that we hadn't yet mastered. And, above all, we would have joined a network of emerging leaders who would challenge and support each other as we grew into our new roles.

My apprehension about the Institute quickly disappeared as I immersed myself in the program. Each of us had the opportunity to learn about our personality type, our learning style, our dominant leadership style, and how we react to conflict. We learned how to interact with those people who have different personalities and leadership styles and how to motivate and encourage staff. We discussed many different business situations, including a very intense negotiation simulation. Finally, we learned a valuable lesson about working together without always perceiving another group or team as competition.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> day, each protégé, as the Institute participants was called, was assigned a mentor. Our mentor would guide us over the next 6 months, as we developed new skills and implemented a project that would tie together everything that we had learned. When the mentors arrived, the protégés were impressed by the closeness of the group. We all agreed that we would continue to support each other and work together so that one day, we would be that group of mentors, called upon to help out another group of emerging leaders in the field.

Since my attendance at the Institute, I have used many of the tools I have learned. I was struck by the analogy that all of the skills we learned are similar to clubs in a golf bag. Each leader must know which club to use at what time. Using this analogy as the guiding principle for my work, I am constantly reminding myself to determine what club I need for each experience. I look at each new day as an opportunity to strengthen the skills I have learned and help others around me learn from my experience as well.

It is often difficult not to fall back into our old habits. Our jobs can be very stressful and require a lot of our time and energy. When I find myself in a new or challenging situation, I take a moment to reflect on what I have learned, take a deep breath and know that there are 12 friends and colleagues that support and believe in me, as I believe in

each of them. We were very blessed to have had an opportunity to focus on ourselves and our skills. I knew I would come away from the experience a stronger leader. What I did not know was that I would also leave the Institute a stronger, healthier person.

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